

wherein the assist gas is oxygen containing less than 500 ppm by volume of argon as impurities.--

Amend claim 5 as follows:

--5. (twice amended) The method as claimed in claim 1,
C1 wherein the assist gas is a nitrogen/oxygen mixture having an oxygen content greater than 0% by volume and less than 8% by volume, the rest being nitrogen.--

Amend claim 6 as follows:

--6. (twice amended) The method as claimed in claim 1,
wherein the optical means is arranged so as to obtain at least one first focusing point positioned near the upper surface of the workpiece to be cut, or in the thickness of the workpiece to be cut in a region close to said upper surface, and at least one second focusing point positioned near the lower surface of the workpiece to be cut and in the thickness of the latter, or beyond the latter.--

Add the following new claims:

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--11. (new) The method of claim 2, wherein the multifocus optical means comprises a bifocal lens.

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--12. (new) The method of claim 3, wherein the assist gas is an oxygen/nitrogen mixture containing from 92 to 98% nitrogen.

--13. (new) The method as claimed in claim 4, wherein

the assist gas is oxygen containing less than 100 ppm by volume of argon as impurities.

--14. (new) The method as claimed in claim 5, wherein the assist gas is a nitrogen/oxygen mixture having an oxygen content between 150 ppm by volume and 5% by volume, the rest being nitrogen.

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--15. (new) The method as claimed in claim 6, wherein the first focusing point positioned so as to coincide with said upper surface.

--16. (new) The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the source of assist gas feeds the nozzle with a nitrogen/oxygen mixture containing at least 90% nitrogen.

--17. (new) A method of cutting a workpiece comprising the steps of:

providing a laser cutting device comprising:
a laser generator that produces as an output a laser beam;

an optical focusing device arranged in a path of the laser beam; and

at least one source of an assist gas for the laser beam; and

moving the laser cutting device with respect to the workpiece so as to cut the workpiece;

wherein the optical focusing device is a multifocus device so that a beam exiting the focusing device is simultaneously focused at a plurality of separate focusing points.

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--18. (new) The method of claim 17, wherein the workpiece comprises at least one of stainless steel, coated steel, aluminum and aluminum alloy.

--19. (new) The method of claim 18, wherein the optical focusing device comprises a bifocal lens.

--20. (new) The method of claim 19, wherein the plurality of separate focusing points includes a first focusing point near an upper surface of the workpiece, and a second focusing point near a lower surface of the workpiece.

--21. (new) The method of claim 17, wherein the plurality of separate focusing points includes a first focusing point near an upper surface of the workpiece, and a second focusing point near a lower surface of the workpiece.--

REMARKS

This application has been amended so as to place it in condition for allowance at the time of the next Official Action.

The Official Action rejects claims 1-9 under 35 USC §112, second paragraph as being indefinite. Underlying this rejection is the use of "preferably" in the rejected claims.